

# THE OUTLET

*BLOOM WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED*



**ARTS AND LETTERS**  
**SEVENTEENTH EDITION, 2025**

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### Cover Illustration:

#### **"A Tiny Part of a Big Picture"**

by Challice LaRose, Digital Photography

**Booklet Design and Layout** by Jessica Leake

## JUDGES' BIOGRAPHIES

### Selection of Arts and Letters

#### VISUAL ARTWORK

Juried and selected by:

**Gary Bergel**, a multidisciplinary exhibiting artist, is a member of the Berkeley and Jefferson County Arts Councils and co-op galleries. Gary has been awarded the 2nd Place Juror's Award in Photography at the Washington County Museum of Fine Art Cumberland Photography competition.

**Sandra Baker**, Digital Media Instructor, is an active member of the Cultural Events Committee and has written fiction herself. Her passion for expression extends to photography and digital art.

#### LITERARY ARTWORK

Juried and selected by:

**Dr. Katherine Cox**, Associate Dean of Humanities and Professor of English, has published sixteen poems in *The Outlet* in the past. She is faculty advisor to the Creative Writing Club.

**Ann Gentile**, Program Coordinator of Business and Assistant Professor of English, taught Creative Writing classes at the high school level and has published poetry and art in *The Outlet* four times since joining the Blue Ridge CTC community full-time in 2022.

**Aspen Monsma** Student Access Coordinator, has published poems in *The Outlet* in the last three issues. While they have also written and published fiction, non-fiction, and drama; poetry has become a familiar friend that allows them

to explore themes of identity, nostalgia, and longing.

**Dr. Billie Unger**, Liberal Arts Program Coordinator and Tenured Professor of Communications, has written poetry as gifts for friends and family members since she was a child, was instrumental in the creation of the original *Outlet Literary Magazine* in 2009, and has been a regular contributor of photos and poems over the years.

**Nicole Yurcaba (Нікола Юрцаба)** is a Ukrainian American of Hutsul/Lemko origin. Her poems and reviews have appeared in *Appalachian Heritage*, *Atlanta Review*, *Seneca Review*, *New Eastern Europe*, and Ukraine's *Euromaidan Press*, *Lit Gazeta*, *Chytomo*, *Bukvoid*, and *The New Voice of Ukraine*. She currently serves as the Humanities Coordinator at BRCTC.

#### EDITING TEAM

Kelly Shurnitski  
Dr. Katherine Cox

#### FROM THE EDITORS:

##### 9 Questions for You

Please scan the QR code below to help *The Outlet* continue to prove relevant and significant to its readers.



## ***ART WINNERS***

### **First Place**

#### **Fleeting Moment, Dying Light**

by Jackie Mink

pg. 35

### **Second Place**

#### **101 Butterflies**

by Antonia Capriotti

pg. 14

### **Third Place**

#### **송민기 (Song Mingi)**

by Devyn Lewis

pg. 42

## ***HONORABLE MENTIONS IN ART***

### **Supernova**

by Mackenzie Jaquez

pg. 37

### **A Cosmic Flow of Colors**

by Timothy Payton

pg. 31

### **Phlegm de la Phlegm**

by Vaughn Marciان

pg. 43

### **One Year Apart**

by Kelly Shurnitski

pg. 47

### **Tap Tap Hello**

by Jackie Mink

pg. 23

### **Dial M for...**

by Omar Williams

pg. 27

## ***LITERATURE WINNERS***

### **First Place**

#### **Sweetness in the Crossing**

by Spencer Faircloth

pg. 8

### **Second Place**

#### **i found you**

by Stefanny Galindo

pg. 58

### **Third Place**

#### **Pulsar Star**

by Miles McKay

pg. 20

## ***HONORABLE MENTIONS***

### **MADNESS**

by Robert Baugher

pg. 30

### **A Road**

by William Robertson

pg. 32

### **The Girl Who Searched for a Dragon**

by Crystal Zhou

pg. 56

### ***ROSES OF LOVE***

by Kyra Fox

Gold is the rose that said hello  
On that meaningful spring day  
That friends began to grow

Pink is the rose that made me smile  
On that cheerful summer day  
That you made life worthwhile

Red is the rose that touched my lips  
On that beautiful fall day  
That you gave me a kiss

White is the rose that strode the aisle  
On that faithful day  
We vowed to ever stay



***WHERE YESTERDAY STILL LINGERS***

by Megan Anderson

Digital Photography

***SWEETNESS IN THE CROSSING***

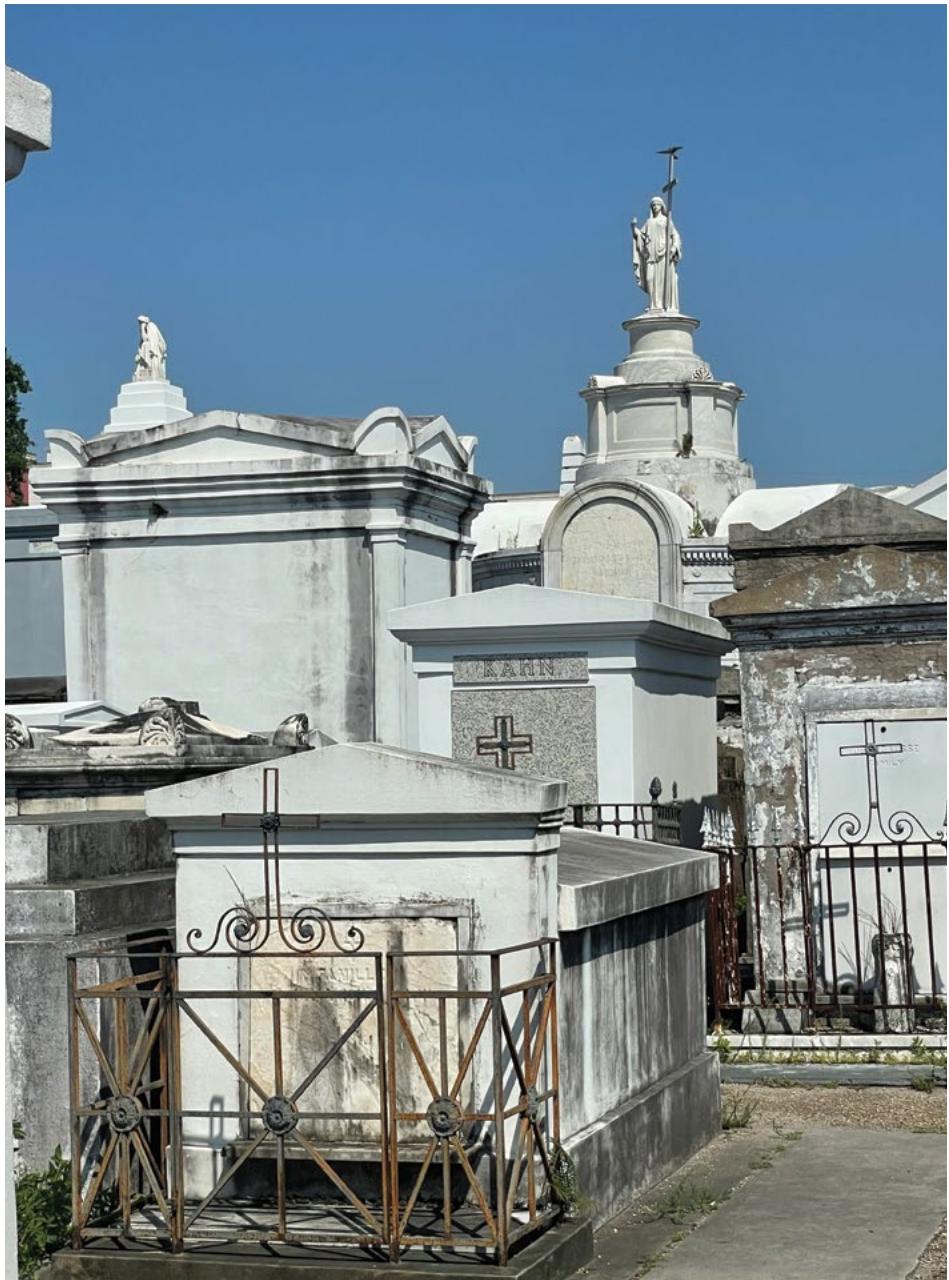
by Spencer Faircloth

It brings me joy,  
around the bend,  
to cross this river anew.  
Each step a whirl –

waves cut through me,  
spilling at the seams,  
until I reach the other side:  
sweetness in the crossing.

Fierce in our longing,  
we move through the hall,  
joining again –  
to one, the same.

Metal rings resound,  
the past hums through.  
Wood and water hold us fast,  
forged within our memory.



***SILENT CRYPT***

by Heather Huggett

Digital Photography

## **SEPTEMBER THROUGH NOVEMBER**

by Jazmine Link

September through November is my favorite time of year.  
And each time it comes around it just fills my heart with cheer!  
My love for the pumpkin patch, it pierces me like a spear.  
The children have already begun to sharpen their carving gear.

I love to sit by the fire, sipping my warm apple cider.  
As I look to the north, I hear the thundering hooves of the Midnight Rider.  
I wait all year to taste my favorite beverage of all.  
It warms the heart and represents the sweetest part of fall!

My apple scented candles, I light them with a match.  
They illuminate the sitting room, revealing my sleeping black cat.  
Lucinda loves to dress up, she is the costume Queen.  
There is no doubt that she just loves the spirit of Halloween.

The children always stop to ask me, “Trick or Treat?”  
I always reply, with a sly look in my eye, “My treats—they are just too sweet.”  
September through November is my favorite time of season.  
I can’t help but be swept up in the moment, and I think you know the reason.



***NOT YET***

by Kelly Shurnitski

Digital Photography

## ***CLOSE AGAIN***

by Katherine Cox

Close again, floating amidst the hint of a mist above a creek,  
I am in the element of water and back to it.  
What do you do on earth when your loved one  
is not on it anymore? A gray heron lifts off with broad wings  
from a shore nearby, yet, far across flat water in my view.  
I trail in my tube, tied to my husband's kayak, and am free  
to look around and think of what has come and what has gone.  
I have no mooring, no oar, no steering, just time,  
viewing the bubbles and dragonflies on the water we left  
then looking ahead at where we are going. My sister is widowed  
three years ago and six months, and I am partnered, still.  
Blood stirs deep, and I would like to cry again for her,  
but I am comforted, lulled, whole now, and back touching what I've known  
more than other mediums. The reflections on water is where I create,  
rowing for over a decade on it, walking by it, or now, touching it again.  
Sister, may you know the healing element of being close again.



***NOVEMBER ALONG THE SHENANDOAH***

by Gary Bergel

Digital Photography



**101 BUTTERFLIES**

by Antonia Capriotti

Prismacolor Drawing



***GALAXY BOOKMARK***

by Dianne Rose

Wet on Wet Watercolor

## **WHOLE**

by Katherine Cox

Just two stars in the sky, and I am whole.  
My sense of weary self is left behind.  
I breathe cold air and drink it to the soul.  
I know there is a purpose to my kind.  
To be outside and look up is a balm  
and healing to a mind replete with thought.  
It catches me and gives a sudden calm,  
a break from my to-do, my done, my ought,  
my tension and intention to do good  
and also to do well and chase the work  
that leaves me full of sense of all I should  
complete and give, my don't give in and shirk—  
it takes me out of feeling flesh and bone  
and catches me and renders me alone.



***HEART OF THE FLOCK***

by Trina Bartlett

Digital Photography

***SECRETS***

by Eric Clarke

Knowledge without name  
a passing glance of longing  
meetings in the dark  
a solemn whisper goodbye  
a romance now forgotten



***WINTER WHITE***

by Dr. Billie Unger

Digital Photography

***PULSAR STAR***

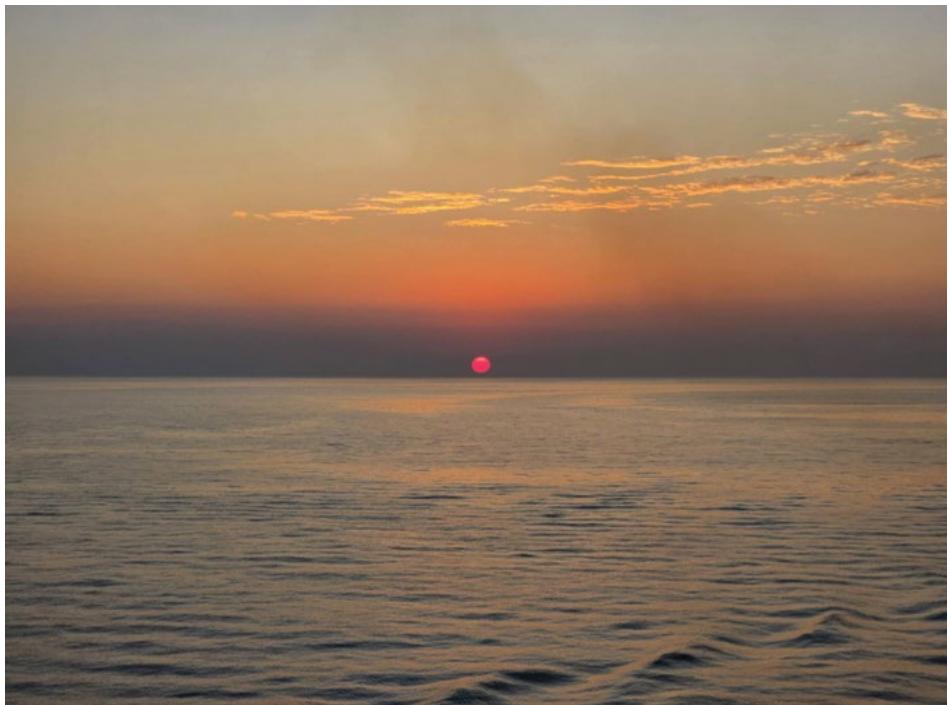
by Miles McKay

A pulsing light house

The cosmos's glowing beacon

Massive spinning clock

Stretching an invisible fabric



***RED-EYE FLOAT***

by Dr. Billie Unger

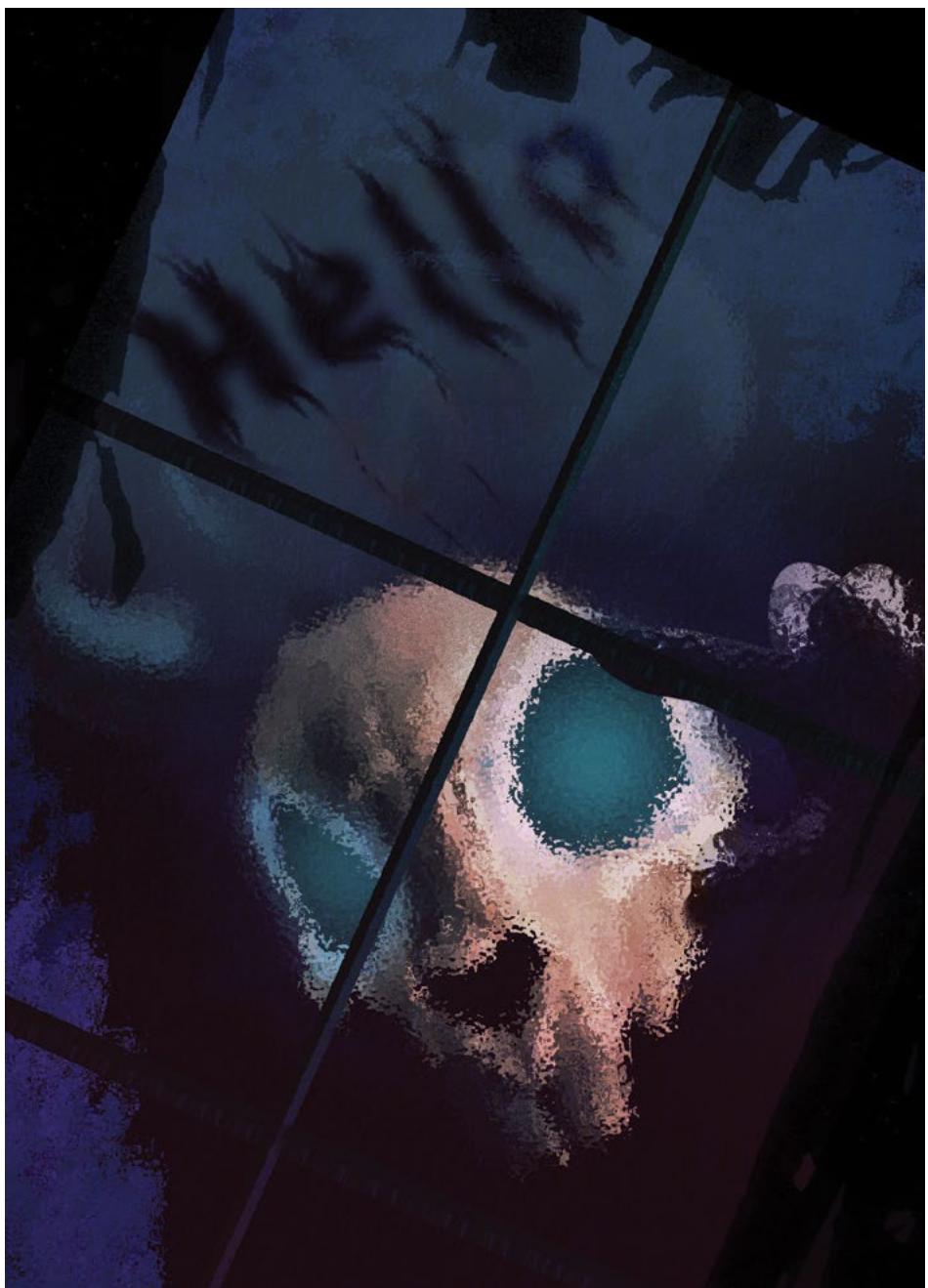
Digital Photography



***NO MOOR***

by Sandra Baker

Digital Photography



***TAP TAP HELLO***

by Jackie Mink

Photography and Photoshop

## THE PINHEAD

by Bruce Kowiatek

“Out! Out, damned whore!”

Giuseppe pressed his back and body even harder against the castle hallway wall as a screaming half-naked young woman fled past him from Thomas’ room. She was met further down the dark corridor by Thomas’ two brothers, who escorted the woman of ill repute out of his sight. Giuseppe relaxed somewhat but still tightly gripped the covered device resembling a birdcage that he was holding. He looked toward Thomas’ open door, from whence Thomas now appeared, holding a burning fireplace log in his hand.

“Friar,” Giuseppe offered sheepishly, “may I enter?”

“If you must!” Thomas shouted and then disappeared into his room.

Giuseppe entered cautiously to find Thomas replacing the log into his hearth.

“My brothers,” Thomas began, “and my entire family are holding me captive here against my will in an attempt to dissuade me from joining the Dominicans. As you saw, they even went as far as to hire a common street prostitute to seduce me and try to turn me away from my oath of celibacy! But my mind is set!”

Thomas noticed what Giuseppe was holding. “I have no need of any fowl, sir,” he said.

Giuseppe bowed his head slightly. “Forgive me, Friar,” he started, “this was the best container that I could find. If I may?” He motioned to a small table girdled by two chairs near one of the room’s windows.

Thomas nodded his approval whereupon Giuseppe set what he was holding upon the tabletop and removed the canvas covering to indeed reveal a birdcage; however, inside was a strange device the likes of which Thomas had never observed before. Giuseppe removed the cage’s topping and then the device to set it upon the table and placed the empty cage on the flooring next to it.

Intrigued, Thomas motioned to Giuseppe. “Please sit,” he said.

The two men took their seats and, looking the device over, Thomas inquired, “From whence have you acquired such a thing as this?”

Giuseppe bowed his head slightly once more. “Friar, I confess for the sins of my father, his father, and their fathers before them, for my family are the descendants of Roman soldiers who looted, pillaged, and ultimately burned down the Great Library of Alexandria, Egypt. This device was one of the fruits of their plundering.”

Thomas paused a moment before speaking up. “In addition to the teachings of Aristotle, I also ascribe to the word of Ezekiel, who prophesied the coming of our Lord and Savior, that the child will not share the guilt of the parent. I hold no ill will against you, sir. What name do you go by?”

“Giuseppe, Friar. My name is Giuseppe.” He looked up to once more to face Thomas.

“Very well, Giuseppe. Now, how does one operate this device?”

“If you would be so kind as to raise your window blind a bit more to allow the remaining

sunlight of the day to reflect off of this mirror..."

Thomas stood, walked to his window to oblige Thomas and then reseated himself.

Giuseppe plucked a hair from his own head and placed it upon a platform on the device. "... Which then enters these lower lenses above this platform and then to these..."

"Binocular lenses!" Thomas finished. "May I?"

Giuseppe moved his chair over to afford room for Thomas to peer through the eyepieces of the device's binocular top lenses. Giuseppe then turned the eyepieces slightly until Thomas gasped. "My word!" he exclaimed. "Such magnification!"

Giuseppe smiled.

Thomas looked excitedly around his room for something else to observe. "Please bring me one of those sewing pins in that cushion over there," he pointed. "I cannot bring myself to move away from this device just yet!"

Giuseppe retrieved the pin for Thomas, who immediately placed the head of the pin on the platform to observe. He adjusted the eyepieces a little more and gasped even louder than he had previously. He sat back in his chair. "They're moving! They must be...alive!" He motioned to Giuseppe, "Please, see for yourself!"

As Giuseppe leaned in for a look, Thomas looked up and around his room. "How did they get there?" he asked and then answered himself, "They must be able to fly through the air! They must be...angels! Just as I have always believed, our Great Creator has stationed angels all about us! I wonder how many of them dance now on the head of that pin?"

Giuseppe looked up from his viewing. "Friar, we are losing the light of day," he said.

"Please, I must be afforded another look!" He peered once more through the eyepieces, adjusting them.

Giuseppe took a step back from the table. "Friar," he began, "I wish to impart this gift upon you."

"Thank you, Giuseppe," Thomas said, "and I accept! However, we must leave it in your stead until such time as I am freed from this isolation and near-solitude. I do not trust my family, particularly my brothers, as you have just borne witness to their deviltry. I thought that I knew them, but now I know not of what extremes which they may be capable."

Giuseppe placed the device back in the birdcage and covered it one again with the canvas cloth. Thomas rose and motioned to the door. "Please use the dusky remains of the day for your travels, Giuseppe. Remain safe and may the Lord and His angels bless and accompany you. I will send for you in the village in the coming months I hope."

"Thank you, Friar, and God bless!" Giuseppe said as he made his way to the exit.

"Thank you!" said Thomas, imparting the sign of the cross with his right hand as Giuseppe walked through the doorway.

Giuseppe hurriedly made his way from whence he came through the deserted castle hallways and out into the twilight awaiting him. His pace was a near-run as he carried the device along the path through the woods leading to his home village. In the waning light, he failed to see the two figures blocking the path until he was almost upon them.

"I will take that," said one of the two who Giuseppe could now make out to be Thomas' brothers. Before Giuseppe could react, the brother who spoke whisked the birdcage containing the device from his hands. The other raised what Giuseppe perceived to be a dagger and swiftly drove it into Giuseppe's heart and then just as swiftly removed it.

As he fell to the ground bleeding, Giuseppe could see the first brother remove the canvas cloth and smash the birdcage and device within on an outgrowth of jagged rocks along the path. The two then scurried down the path leading back to the castle, leaving Giuseppe to finally close his eyes for good as the darkness of night fell.



***DIAL M FOR...***

by Omar Williams

Digital Photography

## ***ON THE SHORE OF CHINCOTEAGUE***

by Rebecca Chason

On the shore of Chincoteague, where the wild horses roam among the marshes,

You'll find a sense of wonder and admiration for creatures who truly don't realize their own significance in the world.

People come from far and wide to see these majestic beings in their natural surroundings, who graze and live their lives without realizing the impacts they are making for everyone who comes to see them.

People admire them for their grace, their beauty, and their free spirits.

They are a reminder of how we often don't realize that others can admire us for just being who we are, simply living our lives from day to day.

What we may not see in ourselves as an exciting life we lead, others may be admiring us for, just being who we authentically are.

May we never doubt our significance in this world, because we leave imprints with every single person we meet.

Someone is admiring each of us for our grace, our beauty, and our free spirits, but when we begin to feel invisible, may we all remember that we are just as magical as the horses on the shores of Chincoteague.



***LOYAL REFLECTION***

by Heather Huggett

Digital Photography

## **MADNESS**

by Robert Baugher

*Mind* falters first—beneath its weight, the image outlives the man,  
a flicker drawn too long in the dark,  
the dream that dares to think itself real.

*At* the edge of conscience, reflection splits—  
the sinner meets his echo,  
and both ask which will bear the blame.

*Deep* beyond reason’s reach, the void remembers us not.  
It hums of stars too far to name,  
and yet we call it truth.

*Nothing* moves but thought—  
and even thought grows still  
when silence begins to listen back.

*Each* creation begs forgiveness,  
ink pleading mercy from the page.  
The hand trembles. The word endures.

*Shadow* and flame, both sworn to linger,  
trading places when no one looks.

*Somewhere*, between them,  
the first voice stirs—



***A COSMIC FLOW OF COLORS***

by Timothy Payton

Dutch Pour – Acrylic Paints

## **A ROAD**

by William Robertson

The sky was blue without a cloud in sight, and the heat permeated through the air on a hot summer day. A bench stood silently on the sidewalk and was made of varnished wood that reflected the beaming light of the sun. Heavy footsteps fell like the thunderous beats of a war drum as a young man walked at a quick pace and planted himself on the bench. He wiped the sweat from his brow with the cuff of his sleeve. He had a disheveled look across his face. For he had good reason. His left arm was missing, and his sleeve was clipped to the upper fabric of his shoulder.

His clothes were ripped and musty, and stubble sprouted from his face like a patch of black grass. His hair was unwashed and flat while reflecting light like the asphalt of the road in front of him. His eyes shook violently at the crushing weight that he felt on his shoulders. He listened for a speeding motor vehicle, in the hopes that he could leap in front of it and end his suffering. He thought about it for a while, but the image of his limp and crippled body in a hospital bed ran across his mind like a feral beast. He closed his eyes as he winced at the horrifying thought, and his fingers curled. He opened his eyes and saw an old man who stood a few paces away on the sidewalk. The old man had a long, silver white beard and he wore loose colorful clothing. He leaned on a wooden cane, his arms were dark brown and had purple splotches with veins that covered his skin.

“May I sit with you, John? I don’t wish to be a bother?” the old man said with a gravelly voice.

Without saying anything, the young man sighed with a heavy breath as he turned his head down toward the concrete surface of the sidewalk and looked at his feet. The old man moved to sit down without saying anything, as his arm was shaking as he leaned on his cane. As he landed on the bench, he let out a guttural groan.

“I’m sorry, John, I know this has been hard on you, but you have to understand that we can’t get everything we want out of life. Sometimes we have to appreciate the things we have in the moment,” the old man said as he placed his hand on the young man’s shoulder.

“Why didn’t mom or dad come looking for me?” the young man asked.

“Oh, they knew where you were; you are still a restless spirit at heart,” the old man said with a grin.

“This isn’t fair, none of this makes any sense, the world is not a good place, grandpa,” the young man said with a dejected tone that sounded like the words of a mortician, cold and soulless.

“It was a vote of no confidence, John, the parliament has that power, it’s... part of the democratic process,” the old man said with a struggling voice.

“They are traitors, the prime minister defended us during the war, a war I fought for, my friends gave their lives for the honor of our country, we sacrificed for this country. And this is how we are repaid,” the young man said with righteous indignation as hate flowed like lava from behind gritted teeth.

“The war was lost before it began, John. You have to understand that; you were

outnumbered two to one,” the old man replied, taking long breaths.

“The prime minister was the only one who was willing to stand up against our enemies, and after we fight, after our nation is beaten and defeated, we turn our backs on him. The one man with a backbone and they remove him,” the young man said as he sprang up from the bench with a wild fury. “Vote...of...no...confidence.” He whispered under his breath in a mocking tone.

“Now don’t get so excited, John, it’s all in the past now,” the old man replied as he slowly struggled to get to his feet while leaning on his cane.

“No grandpa, it is as it is, the old world refuses to die and the new world struggles to be born,” the young man said as he shifted his gaze toward the road.

“John, you have to understand, you have to be pragmatic, you must be empathetic to the world around you. We all make sacrifices every day. I know that you may have sacrificed more than others have and had friends who gave... everything they had. But the world is not over, there is a plethora of infinite possibilities. The world does not end when the darkness descends and it does not end because you choose not to see the light on the horizon.” the old man said with a forced smile.

“Grandpa, I can no longer see the world that you see, I can no longer feel what you feel, hear what you hear. Since I have lost my arm, flowers have lost their color, they have lost their beautiful scent. Smiling for me used to be so easy but now it is a laborious chore.” the young man said, and he took a small step toward the road.

“You are only lost, we can get through this together, we have the power to overcome anything. I promise you, my boy, believe me.” A tear fell down the old man’s face.

“It’s not so simple anymore, grandfather. The angels have lost their wings and God has fallen silent for the church bells no longer ring for me,” the young man replied, taking another step, placing it on the curb as he felt the old man’s hand firmly plant itself on his shoulder.

“How strong you have become, little John. I remember when you rode your bike to Sunday school. when you giggled at your dad’s inappropriate jokes that drove your mother up the wall. Yes, I remember little john,” the old man whispered as his eyes looked at the road and had a terrible thought.

“It was all for nothing, I sacrificed my future so that they could have the privilege to surrender. Vote of no confidence... it is the traitors... that I... have no confidence in.” the young man said as he felt the world close around him.

The young man closed his eyes as he heard the roar of a rapidly approaching motor vehicle. The image of the hospital room flashed before his eyes, and he shattered it with the force of his will and closed his mind to the outside world. The sound of the motor vehicle became deafening as he took his final step. Just as the young man’s foot crossed over the threshold of the road, the old man kicked out the cane from under himself, jolting forward and twisting his foot. shifting his weight as his grip on the young man’s shoulder tightened and pulled him back from the road.

John felt the pull of gravity. He tried to balance himself with his outstretched foot and

right arm. He opened his eyes to see his grandfather careening into the centre of the road, inches away, he reached out to grab him from falling in front of the speeding motor vehicle. But the last thing he saw before slamming his head into the hardwood of the bench was his missing left hand reaching out; he only felt the fabric of his sleeve brush up against his grandfather's arm as he fell backwards.

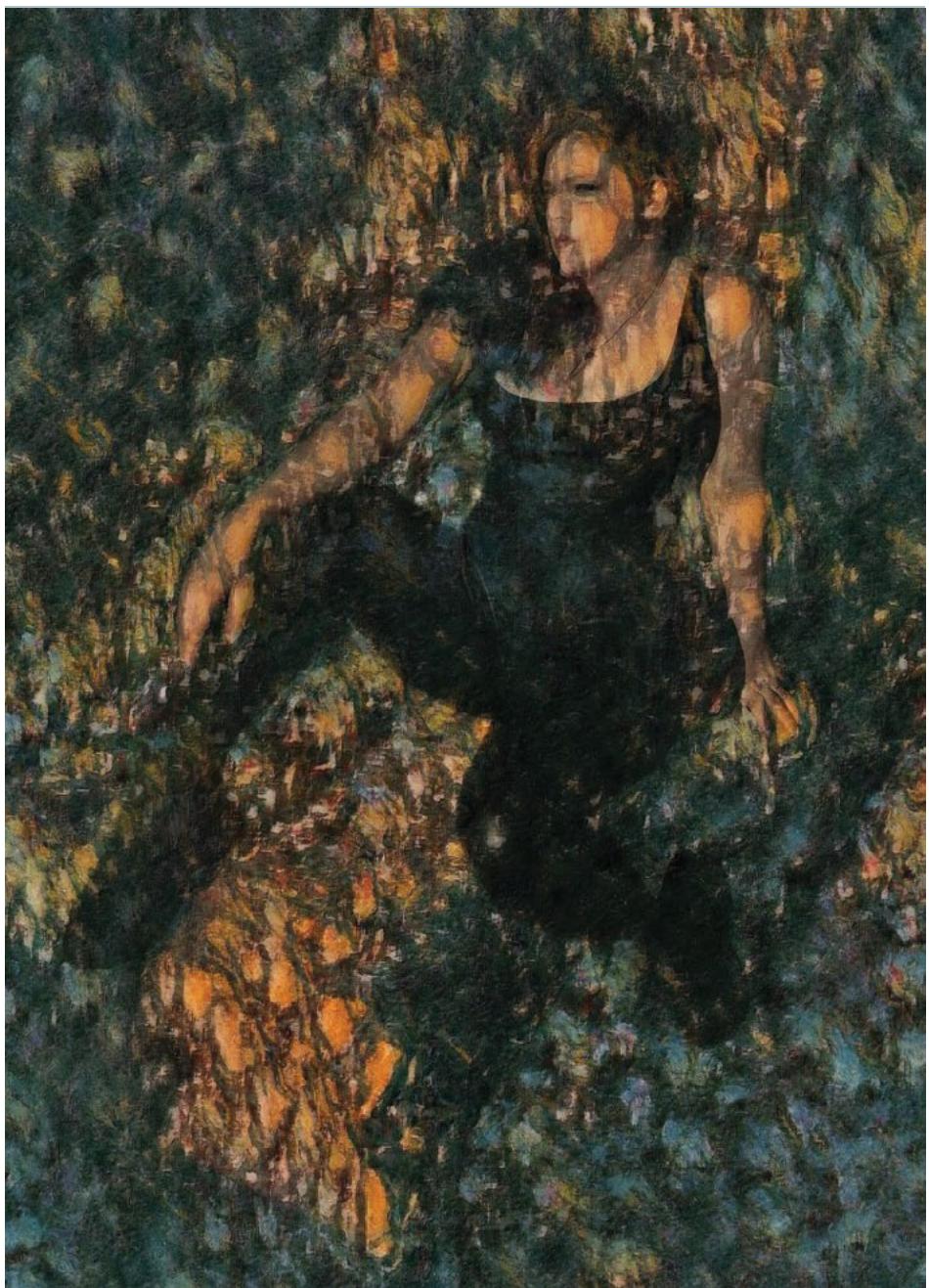
John hasn't been the same since that day, the day his grandfather died. He was paralyzed from the neck down due to the fall. The doctors told him in so many words he would never walk again. He lives in a hospital room now. He eats through a feeding tube and spends most of his time looking out a big window next to his bed.

"What are you looking at?" a young nurse asked.

"a road," John replied.

"Well at least you can watch the cars go by." the nurse said as she placed a vase of flowers on the table next to his bed.

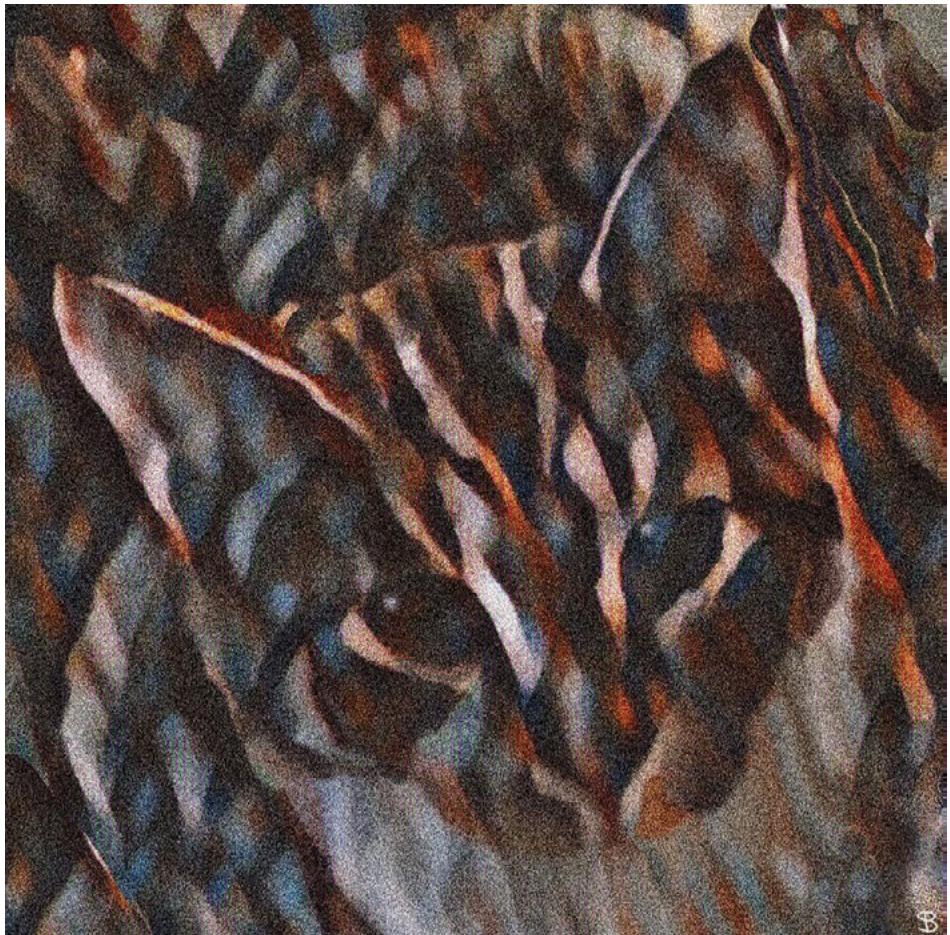
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***FLEETING MOMENT DYING LIGHT***

by Jackie Mink

Photography and Photoshop



***CAMEO CAT***

by Sandra Baker

Digital Photo Art



***SUPERNOVA***

by Mackenzie Jaquez

Digital Photography edited in Photoshop

## THE COST OF ALL THIS

by Robert Baugher

The dead came out of the stockade at first light at Andersonville Prison. They were dragged by the living to the south gate and laid in rows for inspection. They were thin, sunken men—little more than bone and parchment skin—streaked with red Georgia clay and the black crust of dried dysentery. Flies swarmed so thick over the bodies that they looked alive from a distance. Corporal William Harrow moved down the line with the other guards, searching each corpse for contraband in accordance with prison orders: money, knives, boots, letters. Beside him, a younger guard spat into the mud. “Don’t bother with the pockets Harrow” he muttered. “Ain’t nothin’ left worth takin’.” Harrow said nothing and kept working.

Harrow paused at the twelfth body. The man lay half-turned in the mud, a ragged scrap of blue still clinging to his starved frame. His cheeks were hollow, lips split, eyes half-open as if death had come mid-thought. Harrow leaned closer to check the coat and saw, stitched faintly above the breast pocket, the worn outline of a Greek cross—the old badge of the XIV Corps, Army of the Cumberland. Resaca. Chickamauga. The battles flickered across his mind before he could stop it. His pulse thudded once in his throat, sharp and unwelcome. He told himself it was nothing. Just another dead man from another forgotten hill. Yet his hand hovered a moment before he forced himself to search the coat. His fingers brushed a folded letter tucked deep inside the lining, its paper soft from use, edges worn. He pulled it free and stared at it for a long moment, a slow, unsteady breath escaping him before he could stop it. He tucked his calloused thumb beneath the creased fold and opened the letter with his trembling fingers:

*my dearest Clara,*

*i pray this finds you an the childern well. i am much feeble now an the fever has come agin but i take this time to rite while i still got my wits. i give two brass buttons from my coat for this scrap of paper an a bit of pencil, so's i may send you word if the Lord allows. i think of you ever day, an of little Grace's laugh, an how Lydia would tug at my coat askin when i come home. tell em their pa loves em dear, for i shant be there to tell 'em. the sun burns terrible hot here an the nites is no kinder. men dy faster than we can count em. it is August now, i think. the days all run together. i was took at Resaca, under Gen'ral Hooker's men of the Fourteenth Corps. we fought hard that day an i done my duty best i could. i seen good men fall, an reckon i might a joined em if not for Providence. i have thought much on all that has past—Chickamauga, the march after, the long lines of wounded. war aint what they told us, Clara. it hollers a man out till there's nothin left but bone an thought. if i have any sin it is that i let Pride keep me from mendin fences with them i loved. i'd give all the breath left in me to speak plain with my kin once more, to say i hold no anger in my heart. if word ever reaches my brother, tell him i thought of him to the last an wished only peace between us. kiss the girls for me an tell em their father thinks of Home each time the sun rises over this cursed stockade. keep faith, Clara, for tho i am bound in this place my soul is already on the road Home. if the Lord be willin we shall meet there in better light.*

*your lovin husband  
Thomas*

Corporal William Harrow found himself inside the log headquarters of Captain Henry Wirz, the short-tempered, ruthless, and cruel Swiss-born commandant of Andersonville Prison. The hut sat just beyond the south gate of the stockade, a cramped space of rough pine boards and stale heat. Wirz sat behind a worn oak desk; his narrow shoulders hunched under his gray coat as he worked

over a stack of death reports. A pointed beard sharpened his already severe face, and his right arm rested in a simple-cloth sling from the wound he had taken at Seven Pines. He looked up at Harrow with the practiced indifference of a man who had seen more death than daylight. When he spoke, his voice carried a heavy Swiss-German accent.

"Your business, Corporal?" Wirz asked. His voice was flat, touched by his heavy accent.

Harrow stepped forward and placed the folded letter on the desk. "Recovered from the effects of a deceased prisoner this morning, sir. Intended for his wife and children. Request permission for it to be sent beyond the lines."

Wirz regarded him, then the letter. "Letters do not travel out of this place unless there is means."

Harrow laid a stack of five worn silver dollar coins on the desk beside it.

Wirz's gaze lingered on the coins. "All this – for only a letter?" Wirz asked with a dry smile. "Or for something else?"

"For one other matter," Harrow said. "I request release of a body for transport home. A prisoner dead this morning."

Wirz gave a short breath—a slight laugh but without humor. "No bodies leave this ground. They are buried here. This is the rule. Orders are orders."

"Yes, sir," Harrow said. His voice stayed level. "I understand. I ask it all the same."

Wirz slowly pushed himself up from his chair and came around the desk. The boards creaked beneath his boots as he moved, stiff from pain. Up close, he smelled of tobacco and sleepless nights.

"Name of the deceased," he said.

Harrow reached inside his coat and removed a small wooden name slip taken from the dead man's effects. He held it out to hand to Wirz. Wirz grabbed it with his good hand without a word. He turned it over, read the name carved there, then looked at Harrow for a long, still moment and set the name slip on the desk.

"No," Wirz said. "The body stays – this is the rule." Harrow gave a small single nod.

Wirz drew his attention to the letter and picked it up, turned it over, and read the address written on the outside, then set it back down with care. With his good hand, Wirz grabbed the stack of silver coins and slid them along the desk closer to Harrow. Harrow looked at them, then at Wirz. "Keep your money," Wirz said. "The letter will go."

Harrow reached out and grabbed the silver coins, slipped them into his coat and slowly turned towards the door. Hot light spilled into the hut as he opened it. Behind him, Wirz spoke again.

"I suspect, Corporal," Wirz said quietly. "Men do not pay five dollars for strangers—least of all for a Yankee. So, I ask you plain now—who was he to you?"

Harrow stopped, turning back slowly. His eyes dropped to the wooden name slip still lying between them on the desk, the carved letters darkened by sweat and dirt. A long moment passed before he finally spoke.

"His name was Thomas," Harrow said. His voice was steady. "Thomas Harrow. He was my brother."



**OCTOBER ALONG THE SHENANDOAH**

by Gary Bergel

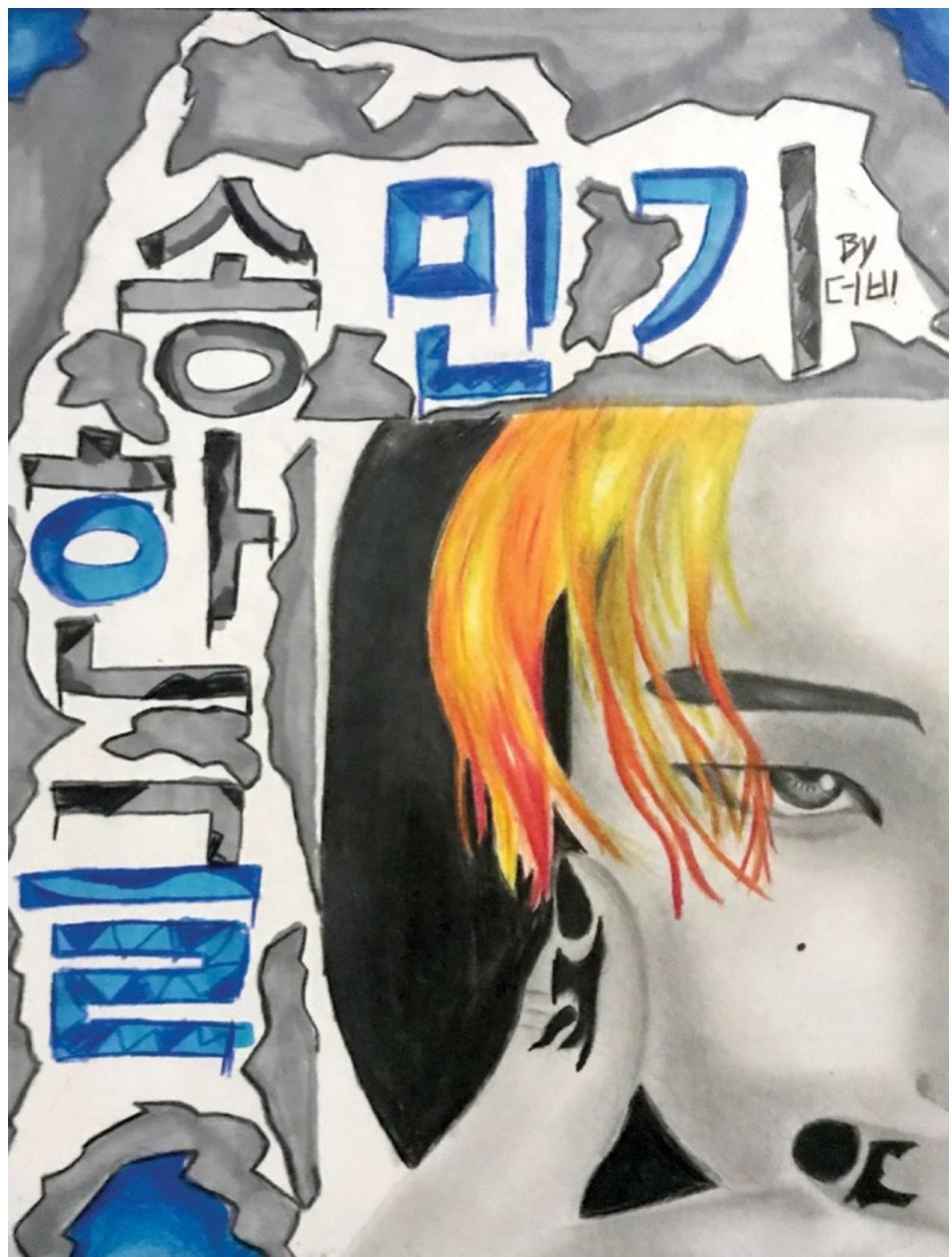
Digital Photography



**YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK**

by Antonia Capriotti

Prismacolor Pencils



송민기 (*SONG MINGI*)

by Devyn Lewis

Graphite Pencils

SO HURT ME! MAKE ME HURT!

I WANT TO FEEL...EVERYTHING!



**PHLEGM DE LA PHLEGM**

by Vaughn Marcian

Ink on Paper

***THIS IS THE ANIMAL THAT NEVER WAS***

by Nicole Yurcaba

*—after Rilke's “Unicorn”*

[redacted] knowing [redacted] anyway;

[redacted] bearing, [redacted]

[redacted] the still light of [redacted]

[redacted] their love

[redacted] they [redacted] cleared the space;

[redacted] the stable of [redacted] nothingness

[redacted] white mane out [redacted] stamped [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] the chance [redacted] might come to pass.

[redacted]

[redacted]

It grew inside a [redacted] looking glass,

then one day [redacted] [redacted]



***ECHOES OF LAUGHTER LONG GONE BY***

by Megan Anderson

Digital Photography

**AT THAT HOUR WHEN ALL THINGS HAVE REPOSE**  
—after James Joyce's "III"

by Nicole Yurcaba

[REDACTED] the skies,  
[REDACTED] the night [REDACTED] the sighs  
[REDACTED]

The pale gates [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] do you alone  
[REDACTED] hear [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] him [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] answering [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Love,  
[REDACTED] heaven is aglow  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]



**ONE YEAR APART**

by Kelly Shurnitski

Digital Photography

コソラツド

恐童

"アヴィン・ルイス

ブルーイ



***CONRAD DARR "LITTLE MAN"***

by Devyn Lewis

Graphite Pencils



***GREAT FALLS PARK***

by Rebecca Chason

Digital Photography

***UP IN THE BRANCHES OF A TREE***

by Kyra Fox

Up in the branches of a tree  
Oh, how it feels to be free!  
Hidden away from all my cares  
That drag me down like big snares  
Oh, up in the branches of a tree  
Where I will be forever free



**ONCE UPON A DREAM**

by Challice LaRose

Digital Photography

**Portend:** It was the final week of September, with fall classes in full swing, when the memos first began. There quickly followed a myriad of creepy occurrences and unexplained events. As fall deepened, a pall fell over campus. Amid rising concerns, faculty and staff walked in one October day to find mimeographed copies of yet another memo pasted all over campus.

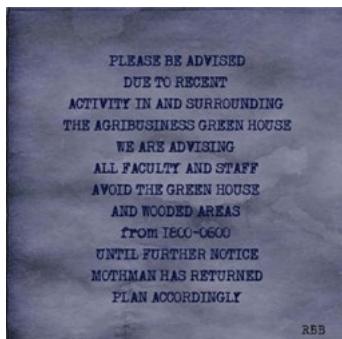


Figure 1  
*Mothman memo*

At first, everyone had pretty much blown the warnings off. Mothman? Seriously? No one was going to believe that in this learned community! Not until the memo placements became creepier; until the sightings and mysterious appearances; until the incident with the effigy. Eventually everyone began to wonder – *Was Mothman, the Harbinger Of Doom, trying to warn West Virginians of impending disaster once again?* By mid-October they were already discussing canceling the annual Fall Faculty Boo Ridge Bonfire held each Halloween weekend.

**Prelude:** Raegan hurried across campus holding her bright red umbrella in one hand and the latest copy of the college newspaper, *The Blue Print*, in the other. The headline read, **PSUT Suspected Origin of Mothman Warnings!**

“Oh, Good Gravy!” Raegan exclaimed, tossing the paper onto Melly Swift’s desk as she swept into the PSUT suite.

Melly sang tauntingly at her, in a soprano so like her cousin’s, “I knew ♪ you ♪ were ♪ trouble when you FLEW iiiiiiiin,” miming a witch hat shape over her head as Raegan stabbed her soaked umbrella into the umbrella stand, and peeled off the matching red raincoat she’d inherited from M/Alice when they’d left the college over the summer. She half-heartedly threw Melly a dirty look over her shoulder as she veered towards Gina and Lottie’s office for a quick hello on the way to her own. Since Melly was one of the few people who still believed in Raegan’s innocence, Raegan was mostly giving her a pass on the teasing. *Of course everyone suspects me*, she thought as she walked along. The memos now bore her initials: RRB. Melly found it hilarious. Raegan was really getting spooked. She turned the events over in her mind, once again looking for some clue, as she made her way to Lollie & Gina, hoping for one of the sweet treats they’d put in an orange pumpkin pail outside their office. It was stocked with their two favorites Gina’s salted caramels and Lollie’s almond joys.

**Antecedenting:** Gerri had found the first warning, a post-it stuck in the breakroom, when she was working alone late one night. She'd been putting in a lot of late nights lately getting their latest initiative The Blue Ridge Career Closet off the ground. It had been her brainchild, a great way for students to get quick access to business attire when they needed it for interviews or new jobs. Her colleagues had been so wonderfully giving in donating their gently used professional digs, she was happy to put in some overtime to set up the room and hang the clothing. It was hungry work though and she'd been yearning for some popcorn. She'd almost missed the tiny blue post-it stuck on the microwave. It had read simply: Mothman Returns. Though the content didn't particularly alarm her, it had given her a sense of eerie unease to find a note when she'd believed herself to be completely alone in the suite all evening. She'd stood stock still, holding it and considering, before tossing it into the nearby wastebasket with a snort. She moved on to popping her 'corn, already thinking about topping it with the caramel in the fridge, and how it would pair perfectly with the sweet apple Annie chocolate chip cookies she kept stashed in her desk drawer. Never realizing, she may as well have been under a spotlight up on the second floor in the brightly lit room with windowed walls, giving a perfect view to the pair of eyes watching out by the greenhouse in the dark. She had never even thought to mention it to anyone, until much later, when the other notes started to appear.

It was 5:45 in the morning when Raegan and Jamie swung into the campus parking lot and began hunting through the thick fog for Jamie's Range Rover. "I'm so tired from all the work we've been putting into preparing for the Boo Ridge Bonfire I can't even remember where I parked my car yesterday morning!" Jamie told Raegan as she craned her neck and squinted across the thickly covered lot "I can barely see in this fog!"

"Well, it certainly doesn't help that it's white!" Raegan said with a laugh, unable to resist ribbing Jamie about the fact that 90% of the faculty had either a silver or white vehicle. When they stumbled across it around the back next to the college fleet, they were both surprised to see something dark jutting from the driver's side. It was about a foot and a half long and pinned to the car by the door handle.

"Is that a black feather....?" Jamie muttered as they drew nearer.

Raegan stopped the car a few feet away and gently laid an arm of warning on Jamie's when she reached for the passenger door handle. Raegan didn't need to say anything as their gazes swept around the lot at the same time. A chill crept over them as they sat in the idling car in the dead silence, their situation suddenly dawning on them. They were completely alone on the rural 46-acre campus, tucked away in the mountains. They were sitting in a dark back lot, which was so deeply fogged over they could only see a few feet out. And something .... odd ... had been done to Jamie's car.

Raegan turned slowly to Jamie and said thoughtfully, "Security will be here at 6, and then we'll be able to grab head of security, you know, the new guy, Ben Bite. He's sharp!"

Jamie replied shakily, "Great idea. We can run through the Starbones drive-through while we wait."

Raegan said, as she put the car in reverse and began backing away, “Make it a venti hot chocolate, extra whip.”

That evening Stefan unexpectedly found himself walking alone to his car in the dark. He hadn’t meant to be this late, but he’d been coaching the college’s *Ridge Runners* cross country team. They’d been attempting a particularly challenging trail, and a few of the students had trickled in pretty late. After seeing them all off safely, putting away all the gear in the Jaime S. Schmidt Fitness Center, and locking up – it was somehow already 7:30! He pulled the hood of his blue *Ridge Runners* sweatshirt over his head and shoved his hands in the kangaroo pocket against the crisp fall weather as he brusquely hurried to his Camaro, now sitting lonely in the lot. *The last thing I want is to be out here having to pass right by the greenhouse the same day they found that creepy blue wing stuck under Jamie’s door handle!* *But heeeeere you are – Great job, Stefan!* he chided himself. *That wing they found was HUGE!* *But a Mothman’s wing? That’s crazy!* he told himself. Nevertheless, it had everyone taking the Mothman warnings much more seriously. Just thinking about it had him picking up the pace into a light jog. Of course he wasn’t scared mind you, just – it was cold, and he was in a hurry to get home – he was trying to convince himself of that as he caught the flashing green light in his peripheral. He snapped his head left just in time to see a bright neon green blur come flying in his direction. He flinched so violently it nearly took him off his feet. He recovered quickly and took off in a *sprint*, eyes now focused only on the Camaro, hammering away like a madman at the unlock button on the key fob. He could feel the wind ruffling his hair...and hear a whooshing, almost like the pounding of wings, or.... there was no time to finish that thought as he ripped open the car door and dove in, slamming it shut so quickly behind him that it rattled the frame. He righted himself behind the wheel, breath sawing out of him, to search the sky – and found.....nothing. He was sitting alone. In the parking lot, all was still, dark and quiet. *I don’t get paid enough for this!* he thought as he turned on the car and peeled out of the lot. His wife was waiting at home for him. He was NOT going back in there to report this!

Dawn was breaking at the college as the CFAO, Greg, climbed out of his red Silverado and headed for the main entrance. He usually loved the peaceful quiet of the mornings and always tried to get an early start. However, this morning felt a little off for some reason. He couldn’t quite put his finger on it, but a mood held in the air. His Oxfords seemed to echo ominously throughout the little valley in the stillness of the morning as he strode along the sidewalk. He noted some unsightly skid marks in the parking area near the greenhouse as he passed. He was making a note to put in a ticket with facilities when he rounded the corner to find something far more alarming. Unbelievably, it was a life-size Mothman effigy!

He snapped a couple of quick photos with his Android phone, then took off running, his Ralph Lauren coat swinging behind him. *I have to get this thing down before everyone starts getting here! I don’t want everyone to get freaked out over this prank!*

**Collaboration:** He had moved fast, but by noon photos were flying all over Teams and people were sharing their Mothman stories. Gerri, Raegan, Jamie, and Stefan hadn’t been the only ones who had had strange encounters – not by a long shot!

As the week rolled by, people were sharing more and more on Teams, and a real True Crimes crowdsourcing mystery-solving attempt had begun. Employees had been finding notes and feathers everywhere! At least three people had seen suspicious green lights flashing out by the greenhouse. Many reported feelings of being watched on the way to their cars. Too many were finding memos appearing out of nowhere when they had thought they were alone. And if all that wasn't bad enough, the power had started flickering on and off in the office suites, and people were reporting the smell of burning feathers in various locations throughout the buildings. Lollie was threatening to attend the Halloween party in a black t-shirt with 404 Network Not Found printed on the front; she was Washing-done with the spotty internet service!

The Halloween costume party was being held the Friday before Halloween this year, so it wouldn't conflict with the Boo Ridge Bonfire on Halloween night, which fell on the following Friday.

Most of the PSUT members were congregated in the Roshawnda S. Parker Dining Hall for lunch when Katarina started lobbying for canceling the Bonfire.

“With everything going on *no one* wants to be hanging outside in the field after dark near that greenhouse!” she told the room.

Her proclamation was met with gasps from her colleagues. Canceling the annual Boo Ridge Bonfire? It was a beloved community event!

“I’d rather fight Mothman off barehanded myself than to cancel the Boo Ridge Bonfire!” Donna Dearing declared. As the Registrar, she felt strongly about attendance, and denying people the chance to attend such an important event was a personal affront.

Jan Monet, who led the accounting program, with her head for numbers spoke up, “Maybe we should give it another thought. We spend a lot of money on supplies, and if too many people stay away because of this Mothman business, we’ll be out all that.”

“Okay, okay, everybody let’s all calm down. We’re not there yet!” Cool-headed Sage interjected.



Figure 2  
*Mothman at greenhouse*



*To read the rest of the  
Mothman adventure, scan here!*

## **THE GIRL WHO SEARCHED FOR A DRAGON**

by 回复 Crystal Zhou

There are many stories about dragons, but no one has ever really seen one. In the Chinese zodiac, all the animals are real, except the dragon. I often wonder, is the dragon real or just a legend?

---

I live in a small village at the foot of the mountains. Our village is quiet and beautiful, with the clear rivers and singing birds. But one year, the rain stopped, the crops dried up, and the wells ran out the water. The older people said, the dragon must be angry. It no longer protects us.

When I heard that, something in my heart told me, maybe the dragon truly exists, so I decided to find it and ask for help. I took a bag of food and bamboo water bottle. At sunrise, I began my journey. I climbed over three mountains and crossed a dark forest where no one dared to go. At night, the wind made the trees whisper, I was afraid, but when I thought of my hungry family and our dry fields, I keep walking.

On the third evening, I reached the top of the misty mountain, there was a shining lake, and something moved under the water. I shouted, “Dragon, please listen to me.”

Suddenly, the water rose, and a golden dragon appeared, his eyes like stars, his voice was deep but gentle: “Little girl, why you are here?” I knelt down and said: “My village has no rain, people are suffering, please help us.”

The dragon looked at me for a long moment, moved his body, and flew into the clouds. It breathed out a great wind, and dark clouds gathered above. Soon, heavy rain began to fall. The rain lasted for three days. The rivers filled, the trees turned green again, and our village was saved.

People said it was a gift from heaven, but I know it was the dragon. Since that day, I have never doubted the old stories, because sometimes, things we cannot see are the ones that truly exist.



***SYMPHONY BENEATH THE TREES***

by Heather Huggett

Digital Photography

## **FOUND YOU**

by Stefanny Galindo

do you know who i am?  
or do you just know what i look like?  
do you see me with eyes full of lust,  
or with eyes full of love?

did you know i like nature?  
did you know i love looking at trees  
while the sun shines on their leaves?  
or do you only know now,  
because i just told you so?

did you know i love the rain—  
that one day,  
i want it dark enough outside  
so i can lay down on a traffic light  
in the middle of the street  
while the raindrops fall on my face?  
or did you only learn that just now?

did you know i love art?  
that i feel most like myself  
when i'm creating with clay  
quietly, passionately,  
pouring my soul into something real?  
or did you only notice  
because i opened my mouth  
and told you so?

did you know i love giving people  
things made with my own hands?  
did you know that if i ever have a boyfriend,  
i'd give him all of me  
through handwritten letters,  
and gifts shaped out of love?

do you know who i am,  
or do you just know what i look like?  
do you see me with eyes full of lust,  
or with eyes full of love?  
do you only see the body i live in,  
instead of the love i carry in my heart?

because the truth is  
you don't know me at all.  
and just for that,  
i can't like you at all.  
not just because you don't know me,  
but because the way you look at me  
feels like taking, not loving—  
like hunger, not care.

i don't want that.  
i don't want rough love, or reckless love.  
i want something kind.  
i want something soft.  
i want someone who takes the time to know me—  
the way i dream, the way i love,  
the way my heart beats quietly  
and still gives so much.

i want the kind of love  
that grows slow  
and stays—  
the kind of slow burn  
i've been wishing for.

and someone actually did.

someone who showed up quietly,  
without noise or demand,  
and still managed  
to make my whole world softer.

someone who looked at me  
not like a body,  
but like a story worth reading,  
a soul worth learning,  
a heart worth holding gently.

someone who noticed the details—  
the way my voice shifts when i'm tired,  
the way i get angry when i'm hungry,  
the way i care too deeply  
even when i'm afraid to.

someone who didn't ask me  
to be louder, brighter, tougher,  
but let me be gentle,  
and met me there  
with their own softness.

someone who made me feel safe  
in a way i didn't know i could feel,  
who taught me that love  
doesn't have to hurt,  
doesn't have to take,  
doesn't have to break me  
just to prove it's real.

someone who saw me—  
truly saw me—  
in a way i've been wishing for  
my whole life.

and somehow,  
without trying,  
he became the calm after the storm,  
the warm light in the quiet room,  
the hand i didn't know  
i was allowed to reach for.

someone actually did.  
and because of him,  
for the first time,  
i believe the love i dream of  
exists—  
because it found me.

without reaching for it,  
without looking for it,  
we found each other.



***LOUISE INFERNO***

by Timothy Payton

Dutch Pour – Acrylic Paints

## ***THESE WALLS***

by Aspen Monsma

These walls are filled with memories  
The red bricks have softened with time  
Ghosts and visions of who I was  
Dance through the empty rooms

She was different back then  
That me that I used to be  
Softer and sharper in different places  
Kinder and crueler all at once

The banister has cracked since then  
The kitchen tiles have more scuffs  
A shelf in the pantry has collapsed  
The warmth is gone, the fireplace clean

Cold seeps into my bones  
To tell me that this home is a ghost  
My warm breaths are unwelcome  
There is no change here in the past

She will live here forever  
Entombed with domestic fantasies  
And I will mourn her loss  
As I try to become something more



**REFLECTION BEFORE CREATION**

by Sandra Baker

Watercolor

8

***MANTIS MEN (BASED ON ACTUAL EVENTS)***

by Michael O'Donnell

Triangular head and large green eyes  
This alien creature flying through the skies  
I was laying down for a springtime nap  
When next I knew I was in their trap

It was Woodburn Circle a stunning springtime scene  
The halls of academia in the bright sun gleam  
Soaking in the humanities, learning the classical tongue  
Avoiding all my schoolwork, soaking up the sun

I soon nodded off; thought I saw a flash of green  
last conscious thought 'what could this mean?'  
The hum of machinery invading my dreams  
And when I awoke, my world could I not see

Through the wide universe their spacecraft sped  
My mind in a whirl, thinking I was dead  
Approaching their home near a far-off sun  
An eerie green planet can I try and run?  
These mantis men from some far-off sun  
Have invaded our earth is it time to run?



***THE LUNCH THAT HAD GOTTEN AWAY***

by Philip Libby

Digital Photography



***A MONARCH'S REIGN***

by Trina Bartlett

Digital Photography



***LITTLE AUTUMN JOYS***

by Megan Anderson

Digital Photography



### From the Editors: 9 Questions for You



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